

About Trauma Work

Experiencing a traumatic event is both internally and externally staggering. Because most traumatic events are terrible to comprehend, many people push their experiences from their conscious mind. The defense mechanisms of denial and dissociation are frequently used by trauma victims to protect themselves from what would be overwhelmingly destructive messages and actions by others. These defenses are valuable means of survival until the time when trauma victims are able to process such wounds safely and in the context of a supportive relationship.

In order to heal from trauma, it must be exposed and discussed.

If left unattended to, a traumatic memory will be encoded by the brain in a manner that differs from a normal memory, leaving the survivor of trauma more likely to experience symptoms of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD):

1. A re-experiencing of the traumatic event in the form of intrusive thoughts, feelings, images, prolonged psychological distress, nightmares, and flashbacks.
2. Avoidance of feelings, thoughts, and situations reminiscent of the trauma: numbing of feelings, intellectualizing, persistent fear, horror, anger, guilt, shame, exaggerated negative beliefs, self-blame, inability to experience positive emotions.
3. Persistent arousal or hypersensitivity to feelings and events: irritability, aggression, difficulty concentrating, edgy, over-protective, panic attacks, anxiety, depression, substance use/abuse.

Treatment is multifaceted to assist the trauma survivor to:

- Increase understanding and insight into trauma and its impact
- Promote a sense of safety – gaining skills to contain and ground self to present
- Improve day to day functioning; promote self-care
- Process traumatic event(s) in a manner that to avoid re-traumatization
- Allow a safe and non-judgmental environment to invite honest expression of anger, confusion, guilt, and fears
- Identify memory contaminants (messages from the experience that might hold lies or distortions) to disempower them
- Find meaning and redemption through profound suffering by exploring personal beliefs and values that have been attacked
- Regain a sense of empowerment
- Foster hope and connection with others

Families that have experienced a traumatic event experience a disruption in their sense that the world is loving, safe and predictable. It is important to provide the caregivers safety and support in their care of any involved children.

Guiding Principles in the Work We Do

- We believe, fundamentally, that the spiritual journey is one of finding meaning: Why am I here? What is my life about? How do I make sense of the brokenness and evil that I sometimes see and/or experience in this world? Is there anything or anyone that can help me heal and go forward with my life?
- Every person's life and experiences are uniquely their own. We believe therapeutic interventions should include assessing:
 - Environmental factors: Childhood and family history, especially of previous losses and/or traumatic events
 - Coping Skills/Support network
 - Biological predisposition to medical, mental health conditions
 - Current stressors (relational, financial, illness, etc)
- Grief is a God-given process of recognizable stages to help work through profound loss. As hard as it is to experience and feel grief, its presence bears witness to the love for and attachment to the one who is gone. With each and every loss comes the potential for new insights, understanding and growth. Finding the hope in that takes time: we have difficulty looking toward the future when we are in the midst of our grief. We are reminded that "faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not yet see". (Hebrews 11:1)
- Emotions are God-given powers that help us to pay attention to those things around us and within us. Even our so-called negative emotions have a 'holy' function. Therapy provides a place to connect with and understand what our emotions may be telling us, aiding us to become clearer about what and where we may need to heal. In prayer, we can be brutally honest with God. That is where we must start.
- The Cross reveals to us the seriousness of sin and evil as well as the seriousness of God's love for us. Christ's Passion, Death and Resurrection opens the way for forgiveness for our own failings and sins and the grace to heal from the sins of others perpetrated against us. (Isaiah 53: 4-5)
- God is present with us today. Through every life experience there is an invitation to each one of us to come and know Him better. He longs to reassure us of His unfailing love.
- We are broken and changed by the violent and evil acts of others. God is the only one who remains unchanged in the face of evil. We need His grace to heal what we ourselves cannot heal by our own power. Inner healing prayer is where the one praying gives God permission to come into a painful memory to bring His healing love, and truth.